

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks to Joint Terrorism Task Force Staff Members in New York City
October 20, 2009

Thank you, everybody. Thank you. Please be seated. Thank you so much. It is great to be here today, and I am honored to spend some time with the men and women who are working so hard, around the clock, to keep not only this city but also this country safe from terrorism.

I want to thank our outstanding FBI Director, Robert Mueller, for that kind and brief introduction. As I've said before, these are incredibly challenging times for the FBI. And for the last 8 years, Bob has worked tirelessly to prevent additional attacks and keep this Nation safe. He's been doing an unbelievable job under very difficult and trying circumstances, and we are grateful to him.

I also want to commend Police Commissioner Kelly, Assistant Director in Charge Joe Demarest, and all the leaders who've helped to put together a team that is more integrated and more collaborative and more effective than ever before.

Here at the Joint Terrorism Task Force, we have folks from the FBI working side by side with some of New York's finest, as well as countless Federal, State, and local partners. I was taking a look at the list, and it looks like 45, 46 different agencies represented here. And together, your success in thwarting terrorist attacks—the strong intelligence you've gathered and the hard-nosed investigations you've pursued—has proved to be a model for law enforcement officials across the country, and for that you should all be extremely proud.

No one knows better than you how important this work is, because you've always been on the frontlines in fighting extremism. Last month, we marked the eighth anniversary of the attacks on 9/11. And on that terrible day, when terrorists brought so much death and destruction on our shores and so many lives were lost, many of you were the first on the scenes, saving lives, working tirelessly to bring those responsible to justice, and guarding against future attacks in subsequent weeks and months and years.

And that effort continues to this day, quietly, doggedly, courageously. Most New Yorkers, much less most Americans, probably don't know this office is here, and they don't know what you do. Obviously, you're not doing it for the glamour or the glory or the pay. *[Laughter]* You do it to serve and protect your country. And because of the effort and sacrifices that you're making on a daily basis, we are making real progress on our core missions of disrupting and dismantling and, ultimately, defeating Al Qaida and its extremist allies.

I said this when I had a chance to speak to some of the NYPD leadership team last month over the phone, but I particularly want to express my appreciation and admiration for your terrific work, especially in the recent weeks. Working together, you saved countless lives, and your collaboration earned the respect and gratitude not just of New Yorkers but Americans everywhere.

This level of cooperation and integration is going to be critical in defeating the type of determined and resourceful—and oftentimes in the shadows—opponents that you're up against every day. Nerve centers like this one help you share intelligence, answer questions, and give support instantly. And because each organization is on its own, this task force has shown how much stronger all of you can be when you're actually working together.

You're setting the standard for everybody else, as I said, and you're showing what focused and integrated counterterrorism work really looks like. And the record of your service is written in the attacks that never occur because you thwarted them, and because of the countless Americans who are alive today as a consequence of that work. And so America is in your debt for that.

Of course, we all know that we're facing a determined adversary. They are resourceful, they are resilient, they are still plotting, as we have become all too aware. No one can ever promise that there won't be another attack on America's soil. But I can promise you this: I pledge to do everything in my power as President of the United States to keep the American people safe. And that means I pledge to give all of you the tools and the support that you need to get the job done, both here at home and around the world. And I pledge that I will stay as focused on this mission as you are.

So we all have to redouble our efforts in the face of threats that persist. We're going to have to draw strength from the values that we hold dear. We're going to have to keep our eye fixed on the world we seek to build, one that not just—not only defeats our adversaries but that also promotes dignity and opportunity and justice for all who stand with us.

And to do that, I'm going to need all of you to continue the extraordinary work you do and the collaborations you do. That's how we're going to prevail in this fight. That's how we're going to protect this country that we love.

So I know that all of you are extraordinarily busy, and I do not want to draw you away from the work that you do. I just want to let you know that we appreciate it, we acknowledge it, we thank you for it, and I am going to continue to be standing behind you each and every step of the way. So thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:24 p.m. at the Joint Terrorism Task Force headquarters. In his remarks, he referred to Raymond W. Kelly, commissioner, New York City Police Department; and Joseph M. Demarest, Jr., Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Division.

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